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Viewing cable 06SANJOSE2060, SECURITY MINISTER ON DMA PARTICIPATION AND

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06SANJOSE2060	2006-09-14 23:06	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy San Jose

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.nacion.com/2011-03-06/Investigacion/NotasDestacadas/Investigacion2702320.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-03-06/Investigacion/NotaPrincipal/Investigacion2702324.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-03-06/Investigacion/NotasSecundarias/Investigacion2702325.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-03-06/Investigacion/NotasSecundarias/Investigacion2702326.aspx>
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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6115
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN JOSE 002060

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STATE FOR WHA/CEN, WHA/PPC AND INL/LP
DOD FOR OSD POLICY:JALVERSON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/13/2016

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SUBJECT: SECURITY MINISTER ON DMA PARTICIPATION AND
SECURITY FUNDING

REF: A. OSD-SAN JOSE EMAILS SEPT 1-5

[1](#)B. SAN JOSE 1840 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Ambassador Mark Langdale per 1.4 (d)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) The GOCR has not decided to downgrade its participation in the upcoming Defense Ministerial of the Americas (DMA), according to Security Minister Fernando Berrocal; the minister told the Ambassador on September 8 that he saw no reason not to attend at least part of the DMA. On other issues, Berrocal was fairly upbeat about resources for his ministry, anticipating a 35 percent increase in his ministerial budget for next year, and some 1600 additional police on the street over the next nine months. We view the minister,s public complaints regarding diminished U.S. assistance as mostly political grandstanding; we have detected no weakening in the GOCR,s counter-narcotics efforts at the operational level.

DMA MEMBERSHIP/PARTICIPATION

[1](#)2. (SBU) On September 8, Ambassador and Political Counselor called on Public Security Minister Fernando Berrocal to discuss the October 1-5 Defense Ministerial of the Americas (DMA) and other security-related issues. When asked if the GOCR planned to downgrade its DMA status from full member to observer (Ref A), Berrocal at first maintained that Costa Rica had "always" been a DMA observer. He also asked if his predecessor had attended the 2005 DMA. The Ambassador pointed out that the GOCR had participated as a full member in every DMA since 1995. Trying to be helpful, Berrocal phoned his predecessor, Rogelio Ramos, during the meeting. Ramos confirmed that he attended the Key Biscayne Defense Ministerial in 2005, in which Costa Rica participated fully, focusing mostly on disaster relief and coordination. However, Ramos told Berrocal that the GOCR delegation had declined to take part in a Central American working group, because the GOCR had no military.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Hanging up with Ramos, Berrocal told the Ambassador he saw no reason not to attend at least part of the DMA, schedule permitting. Berrocal explained that he had plans to travel to Geneva and New York (for his daughter,s wedding) starting on October 4 or 5. Berrocal asked that we provide DMA schedule details for his review upon return from his visit to Colombia the week of September 11. (NOTE: We passed the current DMA schedule to his office on September [1](#)1. His visit to Colombia is to coordinate on immigration and security issues.)

[1](#)4. (SBU) The Ambassador stressed the importance of full DMA membership for Costa Rica for two reasons. First, resources provided by SOUTHCOM can help confront the security challenges facing the region, even if these challenges (crime, drug trafficking, etc.) were not strictly military in nature. Second, Costa Rica remains an important voice in DMA, and can serve as a model for others, as the only regional government that had successfully advanced democracy and faced security challenges without a military. Berrocal seemed receptive.

OPTIMISM ON SECURITY FUNDING . . .

15. (SBU) Berrocal seemed fairly upbeat about resources for his ministry, confirming media reports that Taiwan has provided USD 2 million for the GOCR to spend on security needs. Berrocal listed patrol cars, motorcycles and ballistic vests among the priority items on his wish list. He also expects significantly more resources in next year's budget, which is under discussion now with Hacienda. Berrocal predicted a 35 percent increase in funding for his ministry, the largest increase for any cabinet agency. Given this increase, the Taiwanese aid and his plans to move more administrative and staff police personnel to "the streets," he hoped to have as many as 1600 more Fuerza Publica personnel (basic street cops) available for patrol duty within the next nine months. Berrocal reprised his

complaint that the police force and his ministry were in far worse condition than he expected when he took office, thus requiring more time to get in shape.

16. (SBU) NOTE: A separate meeting with Poloff on September 12 echoed Berrocal's optimism on funding. Martin Arias (no relation to the President), who directs the Ministry of Public Security's special units (K-9, riot police, EOD (Bomb Squad), and the Special Action Unit) reported that Berrocal is about to close a USD 5 million loan package from the BCIE (the regional Central American Bank for Economic Integration) that will be used to construct an entirely new (and sorely needed) police academy. Arias expressed hope that the new academy would be up and running within a year. END NOTE.

. . . EXCEPT FROM THE USG

17. (U) Berrocal's muted optimism with the Ambassador contrasted with his earlier stance in public. In a 9/4 interview with the daily business journal La Republica, he dismissed U.S. financial assistance as "totally inadequate" and "not worth losing sleep over," adding that the Taiwanese and French governments provide more. Berrocal said the substantial drop in USG counter-narcotics assistance meant international narcotics trafficking would not be a top priority for his ministry and he would therefore focus instead on getting more police on the streets. He told journalists that at any given moment, Costa Rica has only about 2,600 police officers (Fuerza Publica) on duty to protect a population of over four million. Berrocal also expressed frustration with the judicial system which he said too easily releases criminals after the police arrest them. Berrocal said he was treating the situation as a national emergency, but would not declare an emergency for fear of scaring away foreign investment. He made similar comments (without mentioning the United States) in television interviews the week of 9/4.

COMMENT:

18. (C) Based on this conversation, it appears that the GOCR has not decided to downgrade its DMA participation (at least as far as Berrocal is aware). However, "seeing no reason not to participate" is no guarantee Berrocal will attend. At this point, one of his vice ministers (Rafael Gutierrez) is a likely participant; another vice minister (Ana Duran), is tied up with immigration issues, and is only a "probable." The GOCR's workshop reluctance in 2005, as described by Ramos, shows the continued Tico allergy to anything smacking of regional defense cooperation. Berrocal, for example, sees himself as a minister of homeland security, not of "defense."

Our challenge remains in focusing the GOCR on the substance of the security needs here, without worrying about labels like "defense." The NDU workshop helped, but when they think of security issues, it is hard for Costa Ricans not to focus on (and complain about) the shrinking USG assistance pipeline, especially those like Berrocal who well-remember the golden days of the 1980s. He seems intent on finding

other sources, however. This may be good for Costa Rica in the short term, but gives the USG less influence over time. As to his dismissive 9/4 remarks on counter-narcotics cooperation, we view these as political rhetoric. We have seen no indication of weaker cooperation at the operational level, but we are watching and listening more closely, following Berrocal's public complaint.

LANGDALE